

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – July 13, 2006

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Members Present

Advisory Commission Members
Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Tom Dingwall, Acting Vice Chair
Joe Bibich
Robert Boyd
Linda Fulkerson
Tom Heaney
Phillip Quochytewa

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner
Lee Borgen, ADVS Vets' Benefit Counselor

Members Absent

Gary Fredricks
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Opening - Minutes of the June 10, 2006 meeting were approved as written.

Introductions: Newly appointed Commissioner, Tom Heaney, introduced himself. His wife was in attendance. Gary Fredricks was unable to change long-standing travel plans to attend this meeting. The Commissioners introduced themselves, as did the guests.

Communications

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman Ellis sent a letter congratulating Commissioner Phillip Quochytewa for being re-appointed by the Governor to serve on the Commission. Welcome letters were also sent to newly appointed Commissioners Fredricks and Heaney.

Chairman Ellis sent an email to President of the Senate thanking him for his support and encouraging his support for the budget in FY 2007. The same message was sent to Senator Waring and Representative Nelson.

A letter was sent to Mayor Joseph Donaldson regarding his request for guidance on establishing a veteran advisory council for the City of Flagstaff.

The City of Chandler received a letter applauding its efforts to serve the city's veterans. Chandler's \$55,000 investment in a Veterans Assistance Program should serve as an example to other municipalities. The Council's resolution sent to the Arizona Legislature in support of veterans issues was also ground breaking and commendable.

Sandra Flint, Director of the VA Regional Office, received a letter with a list of issues prepared by Noel Benoist, Historian for the National American Indian Veterans, that he had provided to the Commission at the May 13, 2006 meeting. The majority of issues raised in his letter were within the scope of the VA, rather than the State of Arizona.

Agency Announcements and Updates

Freedom License Plates

Mike Klier distributed a summary of the bills and the budget issues resolved during the last legislative session. He presented a design mock-up of the "freedom license plate" that was authorized by HB 2056. A portion of the license plate fee will be deposited into the Veterans Donation Fund, which may only be used for the benefit of veterans.

Commissioner Dingwall asked about having the branch of service affixed to the veteran license plates. Legislation would be necessary to make this option available. A service-unique license plate frame is currently available commercially and is being redesigned to accommodate a new Arizona law taking effect in September. It requires all pertinent information on a license plate to be entirely visible. Many such frames now hide the state designation.

Eventually, the funds raised by the issuance of the freedom license plate should be sufficient to waive registration costs for the veterans license plate.

Veterans' Cemetery

There is a new administrator, Joe Larson, at the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery. Luella Emmons, Assistant Deputy Director, will be focusing all of her energies on the Veterans Service Division and Mike Klier is assuming responsibility for the cemetery program. A new cemetery will be built at Camp Navajo, near Flagstaff. The National Guard is helping the Department do the preliminary work necessary to build the cemetery (such as environmental studies). Commissioner Heaney complimented Mike Klier on the operation of the Sierra Vista cemetery.

Arizona State Veteran Home

There is a new Director of Nursing at the Arizona State Veteran Home. There will be a new home built on property provided by the Tucson VA Medical Center. Commissioner Bibich asked about the status of the heating and cooling of the residents' restrooms. Mike Klier promised that the restrooms would be climate controlled by winter.

American Indian Veterans

There is a new Native American Veteran Advisory Committee that has been established by the Department.

Raising Veterans' Visibility

The Commissioners are being asked to help with an Expo that is planned for a date to be determined in September (possibly on the 21st). The purpose is to invite all candidates for public office to meet and greet the veteran community. The freedom license plate will be offered at that time, at its first official promotion.

The Legends Race will be held at Manzanita Speedway in recognition of veterans on October 7. Five dollars of every ticket sold will be donated into the Veterans Donation Fund. Auto Trader magazine has offered support for the event and the new freedom license plate by donating advertising.

Immediately thereafter are the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame, Veterans Day, and Arizona goes into its next legislative session just after the holidays.

Operation Enduring Freedom Memorial

Funding for the memorial has been severely lacking. Joan Sisco, President/CEO of Veterans First, LTD, reported that most of the money has come in from individuals making \$5 and \$10 dollar donations despite mailings to over 400 corporations in Arizona requesting their support. Legislation

requires completion of the Memorial by the summer of 2007. Mr. Klier suggested that funds exist in the Veterans Donation Fund to complete the Memorial. With the anticipated increase to the Donation Fund from the new Freedom Plates, the approximately \$200,000 for the Memorial would not degrade the Fund's ability to support other requirements. After some discussion, a motion was made and seconded that the Commission support funding of the Memorial from the Veterans Donation Fund. The motion passed unanimously. The Department also wants to ensure that all of the veteran memorials in Wesley Bolin Plaza are repaired and subsequently maintained. Funds should be available to meet these requirements as well.

Legislation

Chairman Ellis thanked Mr. Klier for his recap on the 2006 legislative session. It was the most successful legislative session for veterans' programs in memory. Chairman Ellis thanked the Commission for its role in helping make that happen.

Legacy Program

Commissioner Bibich asked if the ADVS has a legacy program, where individuals can make donations to ADVS. He mentioned that his local service organization received an inheritance of \$1 million dollars, and he wanted to know if the agency could do something similar. Commissioner Dingwall made a motion to go on record that the Commission support the establishment of a wills and bequests program, possibly through Veterans First, Ltd. or the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. The motion passed unanimously.

Education for families of casualties

Joe Bibich made an informal presentation of the War Orphan proposal. Chairman Ellis complimented Commissioner Bibich on the research he has done. The GI Bill is very complex and even Lee Borgen was unable to answer specific questions about eligibility. Mike Fugate, ADVS Office of Education, was unable to attend the meeting and he is in the best position to provide input to a draft bill.

Chairman Ellis asked that Commissioner Bibich meet with Mr. Fugate to draft a resolution to be presented to the Commission. The Commission can discuss the draft resolution at the September meeting.

Region 4 Meetings tentatively scheduled for August 11 & 12

The Region 4 meeting will be held in Bullhead City. After numerous calls to the tribes in the area, there has been no response. These meetings are not mandatory and it was agreed that there would not be a separate meeting on Friday evening with a focus on American Indian veteran issues. Arrangements have been made for lodging at the Ramada Express for the night before the meeting on August 12. The meeting will be held in their dining area in a smoke-free area.

Commissioner Orientation/Briefing on September 14

The orientation is scheduled for Thursday, September 14 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Chairman Ellis suggested the regular Commission meeting be held at the start of the day in order to discuss the issues arising from the Bullhead City meeting. After the meeting, the actual orientation will start. Included in the orientation will be a PowerPoint presentation by Tom Ziemba, Executive Director of the Project for Arizona's Future, and Joan Sisco, President/CEO of Veterans First, LTD, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Election of Chairperson & Vice Chairperson

Ballots were handed out to the Advisory Commissioners and collected by Gabe Forsberg. The Chairperson for 2006/2007 is Webb Ellis. The Vice Chair will be Commissioner Dingwall.

Chairman Ellis suggested that the Commission consider making it a policy to require that either the Chair or the Vice Chair live in the metropolitan Phoenix area. It would be very difficult for Commission leadership to attend many of the meetings where the Advisory Commission has been invited. This month alone, he has attended several meetings and events where the Commission needed to be represented. During the Legislative session, Commissioners are frequently asked to rapidly rally at various hearings to support veterans sessions.

Region Assignments for Newly Appointed Commissioners

Chairman Ellis discussed the assignments. Commissioner Heaney's home is in Pima County, so his assignment will be Region 3. Gary Fredricks will fill the vacancy in Region 1 and partner with Commissioner Yamanouchi. Commissioner Boyd will work with Gabe Forsberg to make some minor changes to the Region 2 assignments.

Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order

Commissioner Fulkerson had 3 copies of the Stand Down manual and asked that copies be distributed to the Advisory Commissioners before they left for the day. These can be distributed to communities in their respective regions wishing to hold their own Stand Downs in lieu of direct Commission involvement.

Commissioner Heaney is raising funds within the Fleet Reserve Association for the USS Arizona. He had a few limited edition collectors' plates available that are being used as fund raising item. Commissioner Heaney has been involved in raising funds since it was initially established and he continues to work to keep the memorial operational.

Chairman Ellis attended the July 9 signing ceremony hosted by the National Guard where various factions have come together to sign a Memo of Understanding. A copy of this historic document was distributed to all Commissioners. The MOU is an excellent document for providing the seamless transition between Arizona National Guard members and their families, the VA Regional Office, and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, during ongoing mobilizations and demobilizations.

Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m. by acclamation. The next regular meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 12, 2006, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #10005, located at 1611 Marble Canyon Road in Bullhead City, AZ 86442.